

# THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN RECORD



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## REGIONAL RACO CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN DENVER

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) hosts an annual records management conference (RACO) in Washington, D.C. each year. This year, for the first time, the Rocky Mountain Region is proud to host the first regional RACO. We hope the regional RACO will provide many opportunities, including:

- ensuring that individuals outside Washington D.C. have learning opportunities that are similar to, or complement those in the Washington D.C. area;
- emphasize the importance of records management in regional locations.

The event will take place on **August 31, 2004**. Watch for details on the conference location, list of speakers, and registration instructions in other announcements and advertisements, as well as on our website [http://www.archives.gov/records\\_management/training/training.html](http://www.archives.gov/records_management/training/training.html).

## EVALUATING YOUR RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Many Federal agencies are unaware that they are required to evaluate their records management programs on a regular basis. The benefits of performing a regular internal audit of your program include getting a sense of the current “state of affairs” of your office’s records, identifying major problems, complying with regulations (including NARA’s) and helping to ensure accountability, and setting priorities for program improvements.

**36 CFR 1220.42** states that “Each agency must periodically evaluate its records management programs relating to records creation and record keeping requirements, maintenance and use of records, and records disposition.”

Here are some ideas and questions to ask to guide you in

performing your own evaluation of the records management program that you administer.

### ***Decide on the scope and extent of the evaluation.***

Are you going to evaluate the entire site, just one office, or multiple offices for a single program? Will you focus on the entire operation, or specific function areas such as budget, administrative, policy, or research and development records? *Plan ahead!!*

### ***Determine who will conduct the evaluation.***

Normally, internal evaluations are conducted by the records management officer, or team of records management coordinators and liaisons. It is recommended that visits be made to all relevant offices with face-to-face contacts and interviews with record creators. You will need to provide training and guidance to the evaluation team.

### ***Choose the areas of RM to be addressed.***

You have many choices. Records creation/receipt, maintenance and use, disposition. Permanent records, electronic records, audio visual or other special records, vital records, disposition program – use of records schedules, records centers, filing practices, maintenance of all records, including special records (microforms, audio, etc.)

### ***Learn beforehand about office functions and responsibilities***

Educate yourself and your team on your office’s operations to minimize the number of questions you will have to ask. Where are high ranking staff and political appointees located? Are there issues with personal papers vs. federal records? What types of program records are most likely to be found in each office? Where are administrative records?

### ***Notify the offices to be visited.***

Tell them, in writing, who, what, where, when, and

*(Continued on page 2)*

why. Give them an idea of how much time the interview and visit will take (try not to take more than one hour of time for each interview, if possible). Request a point-of-contact name and phone number, and include your name and number.

### ***Draft the evaluation questionnaire.***

At NARA's website, there is a publication called the "Records Management Self-Evaluation Guide." You can use it to help build the questions you will be asking in the interviews, and for the areas you need to examine in person. The guide is at [http://www.archives.gov/publications/records\\_management\\_publications.html](http://www.archives.gov/publications/records_management_publications.html). You should also consult your headquarters records management website, your current retention schedule, the General Records Schedules, agency records management directives and policies, and the latest records management guidance from NARA to flesh out the evaluation form. Attempt to collect or at least consolidate the evaluation data in an electronic questionnaire or table, using software such as MS Excel or MS Access.

### ***Conduct the evaluation.***

Interview as a team; one person asks the questions, one takes notes. Ask if people will allow you to tape their comments so that you can transcribe them later on and not have to worry about taking excessive notes. Avoid being confrontational and accusative; you are there to gather facts and if possible, offer assistance. Write up your notes and send them to the persons you interviewed so they can validate your information. Use the evaluation as a time to help improve the records management program by providing suggestions on areas that need improvement. You can use the time to conduct one-on-one teaching, and answer questions about E-mail policies or records center transfers. Be sure and take along information that may help the particular office, such as copies of schedules, e-mail policies, printouts of records in the FRC, promotional pamphlets and posters, records management training schedules, and the like. Write up your notes and share them with the people you interviewed to validate the accuracy of your findings.

### ***Look at the records.***

Is the agency filing system in use? Are file folders labeled? Are file plans being used and if so, are they accurate and up-to-date? How are documents filed in shared drives of the network? Are all records scheduled? Are file cut-offs being applied? Are Privacy Act records identified, segregated from non-sensitive files, and protected properly? Are out cards used in central file areas? Does each official file station have a designated records coordinator? Are records being retained beyond their retention periods? How are inactive records maintained? Have vital records been identified? Take pictures with your digital camera.

### ***Evaluation report and recommendations.***

The results of your evaluation will be a report to management. Start the report with an executive summary (one-page) or less summarizing problems and providing recommendations. In the body of the report, acknowledge good points, but also point out specific areas that need improvement. Identify which areas were addressed in the evaluation. Where possible, use bullets instead of long narrative statements, as well as graphics, charts, and digital photos. Identify trends that you saw and identify special points that can help you "sell the program". For example, people keeping records past their retention period is taking up large amounts of expensive office space and requiring increasing amounts of staff time. Mention that if people follow the file plan, records will be found faster, there will be fewer lost files, there will be savings in time, etc.

Develop recommendations to improve the program. Be specific – cite particular records. Make detailed recommendations, such as proposed schedules for unscheduled records or conducting an inventory of records. Request a written response to each recommendation within a specific amount of time and prepare a follow up action timeline. For additional information on evaluations, contact the Records Management Division at (303) 407-5720.

## **WORKSHOP SCHEDULE**

### **Denver, Colorado:**

*Location—Bldg 810, Denver Federal Center*

June 7th—Records Transfer and Reference—FREE  
June 8th—Basic Records Operations—\$150  
June 9th—Advanced Records Operations—\$150  
June 10th—Electronic Records Issues—\$150  
June 16-17th:  
Disaster Preparedness for Records Managers—\$300

### **Billings, Montana:**

*Location—Federal Building, 316 N. 26th St*

July 20th—Records Transfer and Reference— FREE  
July 21st—Basic Records Operations - \$150  
July 22nd—Electronic Records Issues—\$150

*Register at [workshop.denver@nara.gov](mailto:workshop.denver@nara.gov). Call (303) 407-5720 for details.*